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Maria Rosario de Guzman

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, mguzman2@unl.edu

Jill Brown

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Carolyn Edwards

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, cedwards1@unl.edu

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Introduction to *Parenting from Afar and the Reconfiguration of Family Across Distance*

Maria Rosario T. De Guzman, Jill Brown,
and Carolyn Pope Edwards

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Field notes, Outside of *Little Tykes* preschool in Lawin Gated Community, 8:15 AM, December 2013:

I am sitting at the waiting area outside the preschool along with several *yayas* (nannies) and drivers whose *alagas* (charges) are inside. Most of the children have been dropped off for the 8 AM preschool session. One woman is running towards the preschool gate carrying a little girl about 3 years of age. Child's hair is wet and child is crying-clinging to the woman. Woman rings the bell and waits for personnel to let them in. "Be good, okay? It will be okay. Love you ... " she tells the child while smoothing out the child's hair and wiping away her tears. "I love you, too:" the child says back. "Give me a kiss:" she asks and the child complies—giving her a tight hug and kiss as the gate opens and the preschool teacher lets the child in. After the child enters the school, the woman joins

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the other nannies. The other women then chide her, mostly commenting that it has been months into the school year and the little girl is still crying. The woman defends the child—saying she has a cold and did not sleep well. Had I not known this was Sheila, the child's nanny, I would have thought she was the mother.

This scenario comes from fieldwork we conducted in a preschool within an affluent gated community in Manila, Philippines. It is typical in these private preschools and elementary schools to have nannies sitting outside for the entire duration of the school session, waiting for their charges. The women sit and chat, waiting for the hours to tick away until dismissal time. As the field notes illustrate, many of these women are involved in the most intimate care of their charges—tending not only to their physical and basic needs but also to their socioemotional and cognitive well-being, support of schooling, and other aspects of their development. Most of these nannies are rural-to-urban migrants, having left their communities to take up work in Manila. Several of the women, Sheila included, have young children of their own with whom they have very limited direct contact, if any. Thus, they were employed to care for young children in wealthy families while their own children are reared by alternative caregivers or spouses left behind.

Anthropologists have provided a rich research literature on family life, documenting the quite extreme variations in emotional and interactional closeness of the husband-wife relationship with respect to sleeping, eating, work, and leisure. For example, John and Beatrice Whiting (1975a) studied the dimension of what they characterized as husband-wife “aloofness versus intimacy.” They and other anthropologists have correlated this dimension of husband-wife closeness with male cross-sex identity, male involvement in warfare and group defense (extensive vs. unpredictable), marriage type (monogamous vs. polygynous), household structure (nuclear vs. extended, joint, or polygynous), preferred leisure and work partners (same-gender vs. mixed gender, paternal interaction with infants and young children (extensive vs. minimal), and other facets of culture, economy, and society (e.g., Chasdi, 1994; Harkness, Mavridis, Uu, & Super, 2015; Shwalb & Shwalb, 2015; Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Whiting & Whiting, 1975b).

Yet, in all of the common household and normative arrangements, sets of parents and children nevertheless tend to live their days and

nights, if not dwelling under the same roof and sharing common social space in at least part of the same homestead or compound except during times while the father was away at war or engaged in other temporary demands related to livestock or subsistence agriculture. It seems that although definitions of family constellation and household structure have been found to vary by culture, in general, parental-child units in the past were usually found to dwell in close geographic proximity to one another. This expectation included the cases of one husband with multiple wives and sets of children, commonly found, for example, in sub-Saharan Africa; in the husband-wife-children units deeply embedded in complex multigenerational joint family compounds, commonly found in India, Pakistan, and other parts of the Mideast and Southeast Asia; and in the single mother-children-but no husband or partner units that have become highly frequent in all countries with complex and stratified industrial economies in North and South America and Western Europe.

Thus, what is striking in the contemporary world is that the very expectation for geographic unity of parents and children is in the process of a profound reworking to include a greater diversity in constellations of family life that exists around the world. Increased migration and mobility, as well as societal shifts, have challenged these traditional notions, yet much of mainstream research and prevailing societal views rely on past notions of the family as a cohesive unit in one domicile or set of contiguous domiciles (de Guzman, 2014; Smith, 1993).

The present volume is dedicated to examining the various circumstances surrounding nuclear and extended family life across physical distance, how families operate and maintain ties in the context of dispersal, and how the very notion of “family” is redefined in these various settings. Research on the topic of long-distance family life has flourished in recent years as scholars from various disciplines—anthropology, sociology, migration studies, feminist studies, and psychology—have paid closer attention to the experience, causes, and consequences of separation from the individual to the societal level. This volume brings together scholars representing these various perspectives and fields of study, utilizing diverse methodologies and approaches, and examining family separation in numerous geographical locations. We highlight the following themes in this book:

Theme 1: There is vast diversity in the contexts of families living across distance.

The idealized picture of “normal family life,” sometimes referred to as the “Standard North American Family code” (Smith, 1993), is one that problematizes any picture of family life that does not include a two-parent household with children under the same roof. Physical distance among members of the nuclear family is assumed to be undertaken only out of pure necessity or as a response to crisis. The only solution, then, is nuclear family reunification and, in the meantime, the work of family life is defined as bridging the physical distance by mediated communication and remittances (Madianaou & Miller, 2011). Several chapters in this volume highlight this point. Michelle Bemiller (Chapter 12), in particular, addresses the very issue of how traditional notions of family life may contradict the changing reality for many families in her chapter on noncustodial mothers either voluntarily or nonvoluntarily living away from their children. Despite an increase in diverse family forms, diversity in the definition of motherhood is slow to be accepted. Emphasis is still placed on motherhood as a natural phenomenon, something that should not be questioned (Ahall, 2012), and mainstream ideologies of motherhood support self-sacrifice and unconditional love. To challenge the notion of motherhood, which sits squarely at the center of the nuclear family model, challenges the core of Western beliefs about parenting. Edmund T. Hamann, Victor Zuniga, and Juan Sanchez Garcia (Chapter 16) similarly address the issue of the “intact nuclear family” as the ideal when, in fact, circumstances may make this arrangement difficult, impractical, or even unsafe for binational (Mexican and American) children. Their study takes an in-depth longitudinal look at Mexican migrant parents’ difficult decisions on family configuration and whether to live together as a family or to parent from afar. Parents in their study are faced with the daunting task of weighing complex factors such as educational opportunities for children, safety, and availability of reliable caregivers, in addition to the ideal of family unity.

Family separation and long-distance parenting occur in a multitude of circumstances, such as sociopolitical unrest and war (e.g., Swaroop & DeLoach, 2015) and personal crises, such as parental incarceration (e.g., Christian, 2005; Gabel, 1992), and at other times are undertaken as a normative cultural practice meant to extend kinship relationships,

such as fosterage (e.g., Pillai, 2013). Separation can also occur due to shifts in the traditional caregiving context, as in cases of divorce or in pursuit of educational opportunities for children (Lee, 2010). How broader societal shifts and events impact on family life was evident in all chapters represented in this volume. For example, Ruth Ellingsen, Catherine Mogil, and Patricia Lester (Chapter 9) examine how parental separation as a result of military deployment challenges families to operate not just across distance but with much uncertainty about the safety of the parent who is away.

Although there is a growing body of research examining family life across distance, this work has not fully captured the diversity of circumstances under which separation is undertaken, how various family members are affected, and how families cope with distance. Much of the scholarly work examining this area has focused on transnational families living apart due to economic migration, with a focus on parents (typically from the Global South migrating North) and their children left behind. In this scenario, the adult breadwinner has moved abroad to earn a living for the family left behind. Indeed, in this so-called age of migration with more than 244 million international migrants, most of those who cross national borders do so in pursuit of economic opportunities (United Nations Population Fund, 2015). Supporting this claim, the International Labour Organization (2015) further reports that 73% of migrants who are of working age are laborers. It is difficult to ascertain the proportion of these migrants who experience long-distance family life; nonetheless, it is clear that millions of families undergo geographic dispersion due to economic migration.

Corresponding to the substantial number and continued surge in economic migration, a rich body of work has explored transnational family life and its impact on families, shedding light on important issues such as implications of immigration and labor policy on migrants' rights and well-being (e.g., Stenum, 2011), the disruption of traditional gender roles in light of physical distance and family reconfiguration (e.g., White, 2017), family coping and mediated communication to bridge physical distance (e.g., Cabanes & Acedera, 2012; Madianaou & Miller, 2011), and the impact of family separation on the physical and socioemotional well-being of family members (Graham & Jordan, 2011). Nonetheless, even among economic migrants, for example, there are diverse family forms, coping strategies, and experiences.

Marcela Sotomayor-Peterson and Ana Lucero-Liu (Chapter 8) argue that, even in the context of economic migration from Mexico to the United States, there is diversity in family forms and experiences born out of various factors, including the migrant family's location. Families living within close proximity of the US-Mexico border experience family separation quite differently from those more typically represented in the literature on transnational families. The *Fronteriza* (transborder) context becomes a "culture" unto itself, affording families access to unique resources (e.g., more frequent family reunifications) that consequently may lead to unique socioemotional outcomes for parents and children.

We cannot claim to have captured the full range of circumstances surrounding family separation; nonetheless, we have sought to represent strong examples and some of the range of this diversity in the current volume. Chapters highlight such varied pictures of family dispersal due not only to economic migration, but also due to adoption, military deployment, fosterage, divorce, and incarceration. In many cases, the families described are in some form of economic, sociopolitical, or personal crises. Yet in other circumstances, families are doing economically well and choose to separate for reasons beyond seeking safety or economic well-being. Moreover, separation can occur between parents and young children as well as elderly parents and adult children, married spouses from their families of origin, nuclear family from extended family, and more.

Theme 2: Remaking family life is a culturally embedded process.

A second theme we highlight in this volume is how the broader socioecological background and "ecocultural niche" (e.g., distribution of tasks and responsibilities, cultural norms and practices around schooling and childcare, parental ethnotheories of child development) shape how families cope with separation, how family members renegotiate roles to bridge distance, and how the notion of family is defined and redefined in the various circumstances of separation. Cultural contexts shape children's daily lives, the settings that they can access, and the typical cast of characters involved in their upbringing. Similarly, the experience of separation and redefinition of family occurs within a cultural context. Just as culturally embedded beliefs and the broader cultural context are intricately intertwined with all aspects

of the developmental and family landscape (e.g., see Keller, 2013 and the volume by Kagitçibasi, 2013), socioecological background plays a significant role in the separation process and all that it entails.

Few studies have specifically looked at culturally embedded responses to family separation or even cultural underpinnings of family dispersion. The lens through which families experience separation is shaped by culturally embedded beliefs about family and the roles and obligations that membership entails. We challenged contributors to reflect on this issue in the works they are presenting. Most chapters address the issue of cultural notions of family and socioecological aspects of family life; however, several chapters in this volume directly address how cultural context and cultural beliefs are intertwined with how individuals and families cope with and view separation. For example, in Chapter 2, Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, Sureeporn Punpuing, Kanchana Tangchonlatip, and Laura Yakas examine the experiences of elderly parents in Thailand whose adult children have migrated for work. In this scenario, elderly parents are left to care for young children while the parents work elsewhere. The authors highlight how cultural conceptions of parents' and grandparents' roles in the family, as well as traditional cultural beliefs (e.g., karma) and religion (i.e., Buddhism) contribute to grandparents' decisions to care for their grandchildren despite the hardships that this may entail. In Chapter 1, Heather Rae-Espinoza describes the landscape of a kin network in Ecuador where decisions regarding family separation and migration are embedded at each step in cultural rules of child rearing, as families look first for maternal kin to be caregivers before any decision to separate is made. In Chapter 3, Maria Rosario T. de Guzman, Minerva Tuliao, and Aileen Garcia illustrate how Filipina rural-to-urban migrants in the domestic care sector "build" family life not just across the distance but also in their new communities with their employers and their charges, as well as with other domestic workers in the vicinity. They argue that the structure and nature of the support systems reflect facets of the traditional Filipino family in such aspects as hierarchy and the establishment of strong ties through mutual obligation and support.

To some degree, the very notions of what constitutes family also appear to play a role in the decision to parent from a distance. In Chapter 14, Yvonne Bohr, Cindy H. Liu, Stephen H. Chen, and Leslie K. Wang describe the phenomenon of "satellite children" – the

process of temporarily boarding infants and toddlers with extended family abroad. Here, notions of alloparental and distributed care play into parents' decisions about how to care for their children and, to some extent, may even underlie the parents' decisions to live apart from their children. In Chapter 15, Sumie Okazaki and Jeehun Kim describe cultural and social underpinnings of "*kirogi* parenting" or the practice of mothers' and children's migration from Korea to English-speaking countries for the purpose of furthering educational opportunities while the father is left behind to continue his paid employment. Both chapters discuss the sociocultural context in which separation occurs and recent trends in the prevalence of both *kirogi* and satellite parenting.

In cases where parents are the primary caregivers and they move away or are otherwise unavailable for direct care, the choice of alternative caregivers often reflects culturally embedded beliefs about who cares for the children. Research in several countries in Southeast Asia suggest that when fathers migrate, the care of children falls to the mothers, who are typically considered the main caregivers even when the family is intact (Hoang, Lam, Yeoh, & Graham, 2015). However, when mothers migrate, although fathers may participate more in childcare (Hoang et al., 2015), gendered notions of care leave unmarried aunts and maternal grandparents as the preferred caregivers over fathers (de Guzman, 2014; Parreñas, 2001). It is these gendered and cultural notions of care that Joyce Ardit and Jonathon Beckmeyer (Chapter 11) address as families reconfigure during and after incarceration. While research acknowledges a great deal of risk for children and families separated when a parent goes to jail, the authors stress that resiliency born from broad and flexible family boundaries, practices, and arrangements reflecting cultural strengths can serve as protective factors.

Theme 3: Stability and change in notions of family.

A final theme of the volume returns to our earlier assertion that although what is considered normal family life is shifting in many ways, notions remain resistant to change to some degree. Globalization, increased mobility, and shifts in the caregiving context are indeed altering some of the ways in which family life is being carried out around the world. The typical cast of characters in the family and the roles

that they play are changing—the roles of primary breadwinner, caregivers, and recipients of care are all in flux when mobility and separation permeate family life. Indeed, this shift is reflected in most chapters—with traditional caregivers, often the parents, physically absent in many of the scenarios posed in this volume and the families reconfiguring and adjusting to new realities that they face.

Nonetheless, beliefs about family life are deeply embedded, and their stability over time plays an important role in the experience of family separation. In Chapter 13, Jill Brown writes about child fosterage in Namibia and illustrates how the cultural practice of child migration and gifting of children creates new, often changing constellations of family, at times extending family and creating “fictive kin.” In communities without institutionalized welfare systems, this practice secures social capital for the future. This practice of fosterage is generations old, and the inherent stability of family life in many communities in Africa is built on the very foundation of parenting from a distance. This stability, however, is tenuous, as described in (Chapter 6) by Kristin Cheney, who examines how the “orphan industrial complex” took root in Uganda in large part because of the socially distributed care system and families’ relative comfort with parenting from afar. Cheney illustrates how cultural beliefs are exploited in our global age.

Whereas it is evident in many of the contributions that family separation is experienced through one’s own cultural lens, this very lens can in fact be shaped by the migration experience and separation from one’s natal home. The rich body of work on enculturation and acculturation (e.g., Kuo, 2014; Yoon et al., 2013) and social remittances (Ionela, 2013; Levitt, 1998) support this point, showing how behaviors, practices, and beliefs can shift in response to the norms of the receiving community. In Chapter 4, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Magdalena Zadkowska, Brita Gjerstad, Kuba Kryś, Anna Kwiatkowska, Gunhild Odden, Oleksandr Ryndyk, Justyna Swidrak, and Gunn Vedoy provide an excellent example of shifts in culturally embedded notions in the context of family life. They examine the extent to which culturally embedded gender roles in the family are in part static and in part dynamic, and they show how shifts in roles and expectations emerge when moving to a nation with gender norms that run counter to predominant beliefs in one’s country of origin.

Throughout the volume, authors highlight the psychological complexity (at times daunting and at times seamless) of parenting from

afar for parents and children. In Chapter 7, Mandi McDonald describes how adoptive parents mediate birth connections. The intricacies that require adoptive parents to develop family boundaries that are rigid enough to provide autonomy, security, and cohesion, yet permeable enough to retain a connection between the child and his or her birth parents are purposefully forged in the distance between these separated families. In Chapter 5, Yao Lu critically reviews the growing body of work on parent-child separation and extends the discussion regarding the complexity of underlying processes and their impact on children.

Definitions of family life are broadened by the many excellent cases presented in this volume. Although most chapters focus on family life when parents live away from their children, family across distance can also occur when children are living apart from all adults in the family, as we see in the discussion about child-headed households (CHHs) in Namibia by Monica Ruiz Casares, Shelene Gentz, and Jesse Beatson (Chapter 9). Sometimes emerging as a result of parental death or migration to urban areas, children live together in households with no resident adult. Although some children in CHHs have extended family, nonetheless, living on their own with only occasional or sometimes no contact with adult family members was in many cases the safest or most practical arrangement.

Organization of the Current Volume

The current volume brings together contributions by leading scholars from around the world who have examined long-distance family life in its many forms, contexts, and circumstances. The sections are organized around various circumstances in which family separation occurs. Section I provides examples of family separation in the context of economic migration. When laborers take on jobs abroad, the family unit faces numerous challenges that necessitate a renegotiation of traditional roles, a reconstruction of children's caregiving contexts, and the development of alternative strategies to maintain ties. In Chapter 1, Heather Rae-Espinoza describes parental economic migration from Ecuador and how the family shapes and reshapes in the process. She presents four cases that highlight the diversity in migratory trajectories among economic migrant families in one country and suggests

the need to broaden our perspectives on family life and family reconfiguration across distance.

In Chapter 2, Berit Ingersol-Dayton and her team discuss the experiences of elderly parents in Thailand whose adult children have migrated for work. Although the typical picture of so-called left-behind members are children whose parents are living away, this chapter highlights how migration affects the broader family—particularly in a caregiving context where the intact extended family and obligations to provide care for elderly parents are cultural norms. In Chapter 3, de Guzman and colleagues discuss the experiences of rural-to-urban migrants in the Philippines who work in the domestic care sector. The chapter focuses on how migrants remake family not by bridging ties across distance but by building social support networks in their host communities (e.g., hierarchical). In Chapter 4, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka and her team examine gender roles among Polish economic migrants in Norway. Examining shifts and stability in gender norms when couples move to a more gender-egalitarian country, their work illustrates stability and change in culturally embedded beliefs. Finally, in Chapter 5, Yao Lu provides a thorough review and analysis of the large body of work on parental migration and discusses the complexities involved in understanding the impact on children's well-being. She argues for more nuanced examinations that take into account the child's characteristics, parents' migration status, and contextual factors in examining impact on child well-being and suggests future directions for research in the area. These five chapters illustrate the various forms of family separation in the context of economic migration and how individuals uniquely experience and are affected by family dispersal.

Section II brings together contributions that tackle family separation in the context of social and political unrest. Such crises result not just in family and individual mobility but also often in separation and the undoing of the family as a basic unit. Kristin Cheney (Chapter 6) provides a critical examination of the orphan rescue phenomenon in Uganda, where there has been a proliferation of orphanages in recent years. Drawing evidence from her fieldwork and action research, she describes how inconsistencies in notions of family among parents in Uganda and prospective adoptive families in the Global North are contributing to involuntary family separation at alarming levels. In Chapter 7, Mandi MacDonald explores adopters' subjective

experience of parenthood in the context of open adoption. In these accounts, the adoptive parents identified their role as “kin-keepers,” regulating their children’s interaction with birth parents and safeguarding their options for relationship. In Northern Ireland, she explores how the family practices associated with open adoption, both structurally open arrangements and open family communication, facilitated occasional physical and imagined co-presence between the adopted child and his or her birth parents.

In Chapter 8, Marcela Sotomayor-Peterson and Ana Lucero-Liu provide a historical review of migration between the United States and Mexico and the experiences of transnational families living on the Sonora-Arizona border. Their work emphasizes the fact that there is vast diversity in transnational family configurations that can extend current definitions and perceptions about transnational family life. Finally, in Chapter 9, Ruth Ellingsen, Catherine Mogil, and Patricia Lester discuss family separation in the context of military deployment and the unique challenges that this type of separation entails. Military families not only navigate the challenges of separation but also the complex process of deployment, the dangers of wartime, and (ideally) reunification.

In Section III, authors discuss various circumstances of family separation in the context of personal crises. In Chapter 10, Monica Ruiz-Casares and colleagues examine child-headed households created by the HIV/AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa. The unique ways that children choose to maintain the practices used by these absent parents and caregivers in regards to care and supervision, discipline, and distribution of tasks reveal a continuity of care often missed. In Chapter 11, Joyce Arditti and Jonathon Beckmeyer consider parental incarceration as a context for parenting, highlighting key intra-individual and family processes that shape incarcerated persons’ parenting experiences. Maternal gate keeping, co-caregiving, and protective cultural factors are explored as they relate to incarceration. Michelle Bemiller, in Chapter 12, critiques the dominant motherhood expectation and highlights how noncustodial mothers adapt to living apart in a society that expects mothers to be primary caregivers. She examines how mothers both accept and reject the dominant definition of motherhood and how that impacts how they see themselves as mothers as well as how they parent their children from a distance.

Finally, Section IV presents research on family separation in the context of normative cultural practices and education. Although separation is often undertaken out of necessity or crises, chapters in this section illustrate contexts in which they are sometime voluntarily undertaken as part of normative care. Chapter 13 examines fosterage in Namibia. Jill Brown utilizes ethnographic fieldwork to describe a system of parenting from a distance in which 30% of children live with nonbiological “parents” even through birth parents are alive. Culturally embedded beliefs of teaching children perseverance, survival, and moral character infuse explanations of voluntary parental separation. In Chapter 14, Yvonne Bohr and her colleagues discuss the phenomenon of “satellite babies,” in which Chinese migrants in North America send their infant children to be temporarily raised by grandparents in China as they cope with challenges associated with the migration experience. They argue that traditional notions of coping (e.g., by relying on extended family) persist even when the care giving context has changed and practices might no longer be productive. In Chapter 15, Sumie Okazaki and Jeehum Kim discuss “*kirogi* parenting,” which is a practice undertaken by South Korean families that sees mothers and their children temporarily migrating to Western nations so that the children can pursue better educational opportunities. In the meantime, fathers stay behind to continue their roles as breadwinners. They discuss the cultural underpinnings of this practice and the reasons for its recent decline. Finally, in Chapter 16, Edmund T. Hamann and collaborators tackle binationality and transnationalism in families caught between life in two countries. Their work examines the challenges faced by children of Mexican parents, who were born and raised in the United States, returning to Mexico for schooling. Their chapter sheds light on how various issues factor into parents’ decisions about living arrangements and how sociopolitical realities sometimes make dispersal the only option for families.

By better understanding how we parent from a distance, this volume will synthesize ideas of kinship, relationships, and bonding and help the reader broaden his or her own ideas of parenting and family life. By illuminating how our ecological niche both affords and constrains parenting options to include the implications of distance, this work will ultimately broaden our definition of family. Finally, by allowing us to know and imagine family life, including parenting from a

distance, as both normative and non-normative, this work can be used a tool as we leave the academy and create a place for more sound developmental science in policy affecting families and children around the world.

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